

July 5, 2006

To Whom It May Concern:

I write today in very enthusiastic and heartfelt support of Chuck Kleinhans as the first recipient of the new SCMS Teaching Award, based on my having known and worked with Chuck as an exemplary teacher for almost three decades. Most centrally, between 1984-1990, Chuck was my mentor and dissertation advisor at Northwestern University. But I had become acquainted with him several years previously through the Chicago “film scene” and also in his role as a co-editor of *Jump Cut*. Indeed, he arguably served as my teacher even then, when, a recent M.A. graduate in philosophy at a German university, I was working as “events coordinator” at the Goethe Institute in Chicago. Very typically of Chuck’s generous and wide-ranging pedagogy, he recognized in my public film programming the evidence and broader potential of my interest in German cinema and encouraged me to translate for publication in *Jump Cut* several key film theoretical essays from the pioneering German feminist film journal *Frauen und Film*. That invitation brought me closer into the academic film community and immeasurably helped embolden me to undertake my graduate study of film theory and history. While I worked with Chuck in the Department of Radio/TV/Film at Northwestern student and in the 16 years since completing my PhD, I have maintained very productive and supportive exchanges with him around issues of publication and my own subsequent pedagogy and professional experiences.

Chuck’s classes at Northwestern were (and no doubt still are) arguably the most innovative in terms of their topics and approaches brought to bear. I readily recall the first course I took with him during my entering quarter, entitled “Light, Color and Composition”; the original course was—again, typically of Chuck—a response to perceived student needs and interests and, like most courses he teaches, adeptly intertwined media theory and creative practice and application. Chuck was encouraging (but also constructively critical) of my film slide series (on “blue” and “a friend”) and my short film project for the course, and I know I learned a great deal on the course’s announced topics, but I also learned how to design dynamic assignments to teach complex concepts and how to integrate and pace a combined undergraduate and graduate students—a challenge he taught us all to master. Among the many other courses I took with Chuck which have continued to shape my own teaching and also research interests: experimental film, film theory (in which we actually watched several films that Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey had made!), sexual representation, and comedy. My dissertation topic (on Mae West as cultural icon) essentially arose out of the combination of the latter three, in combination with my work with Mimi White on feminist media theory.

I would like to “flashback” to 2 further short scenes from my time as a graduate student and insert also a very recent sketch into this account as specific evidence of Chuck’s excellence and originality as a mentor of those striving for a

life of effective scholarship and pedagogy of media and cultural theory and history. The first: I was just completing his new graduate seminar on comedy as I began to prepare for my qualifying examinations. Chuck encouraged my insight (which he commended as original) that West's performances possibly challenged some of the theories of comedy we were studying and advised me to formulate a "case study" question on that topic for my exams. I initially demurred, thinking I should proceed with a more general focus, but, trusting his judgment, within a few months I emerged from the exams with a chapter of my dissertation drafted and a store of enthusiasm for the next stage of my graduate studies that bore me forward. Such astute advice, always helping students bridge from one stage of their program (or careers) to the next is one of Chuck's great strengths that I've tried to integrate into my own work with students, undergraduate as well as graduate.

Another telling incident: my own grad school cohort (which was made up overwhelming of feminist and "non-traditional" female students, our all having returned to grad school from work-a-day lives) undertook to found our own "professional seminar," with each of us enrolling for an independent study course with a chosen professor but planning to meet primarily among ourselves to move toward conference presentations and publication. These were pressing needs we perceived we could meaningfully address together (with us each aiming to have a piece ready for submission by year's end), but which required faculty concurrence for it to work (to share their expertise as our weekly guest speakers and for us to get academic credit for the time-consuming initiative.) Chuck's understanding and support was immediate—and crucial. The "co-op" type seminar proved successful beyond our hopes, with each participant emerging with a publication: mine was the history of SCS that appeared in the *Journal of Film and Video* in Spring 1986, written under Chuck's invaluable tutelage. When I consider my present department, fine as it is, I know that graduate students work hard among themselves without getting the amount of actual earned academic credit or encouragement toward that mode of autonomous/peer-based learning that Chuck enabled us to pursue 20 years ago.

Finally, the recent sketch: the 6 women who formed the core of what we dubbed our "publishing seminar" soon yielded what we called (while allowing no one else but Chuck to do so!) "the dissertation girls' club" –which continues to meet regularly not only at conferences. but also privately, as we remain among one another's very best friends. Just a week ago, as I write this, all of us converged at my home in Champaign for a 24- hour coffee (and wine) "klatsch." What a blessing we consider our circle to be, over 20 years time, for our professional and personal lives. And Chuck Kleinhans is always an honorary presence among us (and occasionally even a special guest!), for, looking around the circle, we realize that we are all Chuck's students (literally: 5 of the 6 had Chuck as dissertation advisor and the 6th worked closely with him especially on pedagogical matters.) And we know that we're only ONE cohort (having entered Northwestern's program within a 2-year period), and that waves of other feminist activist film /media theorists, historians and teachers have emerged from our "hatchery"

under Chuck in the years before and after our time there—and with whom we are also in touch, as “sisters” and “brothers” (my own new colleague J.B. Capino among them!)

My boundless enthusiasm for Chuck Kleinhans’ being honored with the SCMS Teaching Award should be fully evident, but in closing I wish to add that I feel this enthusiasm not only as his student/mentee and friend, but also as a former Chair of the SC(M)S Teaching Committee (before we envisioned such a much-needed award!). I am indeed exceptionally pleased to have this occasion to contribute, I hope, toward the inauguration of this important new SMCS award.

Sincerely,

Ramona Curry